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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

State Department review completed

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17 November 1967

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Approved For Release 2004/10/27 : CIA-RDP79T00826A002900230001-9

Approved For Release 2004/10/27 : CIA-RDP79T00826A002900230001-9

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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Fighting continues in the Dak To area

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Operation ESSEX, a sweep near
the Quang Nam - Quang Tin Province border, term-
inated on 17 November (Para. 10).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Tran Van Don claims that the Freedom Fighters
Association is not yet an organized party and that
it will be from one to two years before it is
(Paras. 1-3).

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[REDACTED] The upper
house has been discussing the question of status of
forces in South Vietnam, and there are indications
that this may soon become a more important issue
(Para. 8).

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IV. Other Military Developments: There is
nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: There
is nothing of significance to report.

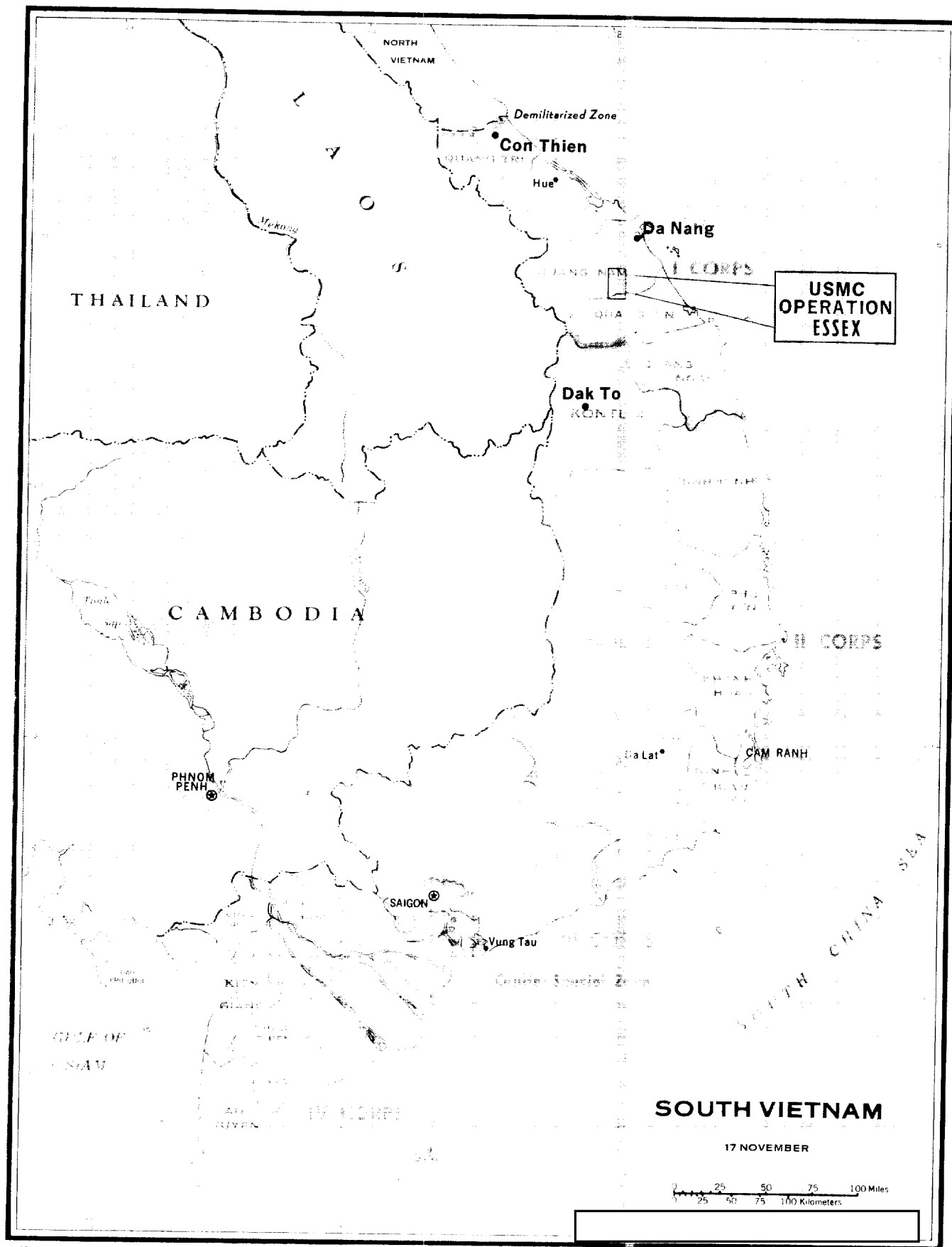
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VI. Other Major Aspects: Two US reporters reportedly discovered a Viet Cong base camp while traveling in eastern Cambodia (Paras. 1-3). North Vietnam has now set up or is working on seven different means for crossing the Canal des Rapides (Paras. 4-6).

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. On 17 November, two companies of the US 4th Infantry Division advanced behind air and artillery strikes to seize the high ground--hill 1338--on a ridge overlooking Dak To from the south. The US soldiers reported the enemy put up stiff resistance from well dug-in positions before withdrawing. First reports state that seven Americans were killed. Enemy casualty figures have not yet come in.

2. To the north of Dak To, a South Vietnamese Army paratrooper brigade lost four killed and 40 wounded on 17 November when attacked by what were probably elements of the North Vietnamese 24th Regiment. At last report the action was still going on. During the night of 16-17 November, another enemy unit--also believed to be a subordinate of the 24th Regiment--raided a small town less than two miles east of Dak To. Three South Vietnamese Army defenders were wounded and part of the village was set afire.

3. The recent spurt of enemy activity north and east of Dak To probably is intended to relieve pressure on the North Vietnamese 32nd and 66th regiments south and west of the strongpoint. In addition, by spreading the action over a wide area, the Communists probably believe they can improve their chances of isolating and destroying an American unit.

4. Nearly all of the recent fighting in the Dak To area has developed from US probes into North Vietnamese fortified areas. More of this kind of fighting can be expected as allied forces continue to seek the enemy.

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5. An enemy notebook captured on 6 November southwest of Dak To provides further evidence that enemy forces there have received sizable numbers of replacements from North Vietnam. The document states that two thirds of the men in the North Vietnamese 66th Regiment are new recruits and that almost all of the unit's cadre are newly appointed.

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Operation ESSEX Ends

10. Operation ESSEX, a 12-day sweep conducted by a battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment in the Quang Nam - Quang Tin border area south of Da Nang, ended on 17 November. The operation was highlighted by two significant actions in which Marines encountered heavy opposition from enemy forces in fortified villages. Over 100 air strikes supported the operation. Marine casualties were 37 killed and 122 wounded. Enemy losses were 72 killed, mostly from the 3rd Regiment of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division.

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II. POLITICAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Senator Tran Van Don recently discussed the future of his Freedom Fighters Association with an American official, indicating that it was not organized as a political party and that it would take from one to two years to develop it as one. For the present, the association is organizing. The emphasis is on establishing local contacts who will join and then organize local association chapters. The political party envisioned by Don is expected to spring from the resulting mass base.

2. When queried about the relationship between the Freedom Fighters Association and the Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc, the other political organization of which he is provisional president. Don said that the two groups would probably develop separately. He added, however, that it would be only natural for them to maintain some liaison, given the partial overlapping of their leaderships. He speculated that the Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc might itself develop into a political party through the connections its legislators have with their respective constituencies.

3. Don acknowledged that there was talk that he would be elected president of the Senate, and said that, if this occurred, the position would preclude his leading the Farmer-Worker-Soldier bloc in the upper house. He would still be free, however, to continue to organize the Freedom Fighters Association and use this as a base of political power.

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Upper House on SOFA

8. Discussions in the upper house on 11 and 14 November, as well as current Saigon press comment, indicate that the question of a status of forces agreement is coming to the fore. During a discussion over the articles governing the duties of standing committees to be established in the upper house, the focal point of debate was the question of whether specific responsibilities for defining the status of allied forces in South Vietnam should be assigned to the information and foreign affairs committee or to the national defense committee. Motions to give each of these committees specific responsibilities to take up the status of forces question were voted down, but an "annotation" to the article governing the national defense committee states that the committee "examines and reports to the upper house on regulations for allied forces on the territory of the

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Republic of Vietnam, when such forces are here." Senator Tran Van Lam has indicated that, while he personally does not favor discussing the status of forces question during war time, he feels there will be considerable pressure to do so.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Bac Mai Airfield and a barge assembly facility, all located within two miles of the center of Hanoi, were hit on 17 November.

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2. The pilots also reported heavy antiaircraft artillery fire and numerous surface-to-air missiles. Four US aircraft were reported lost, two of them to SAMs.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

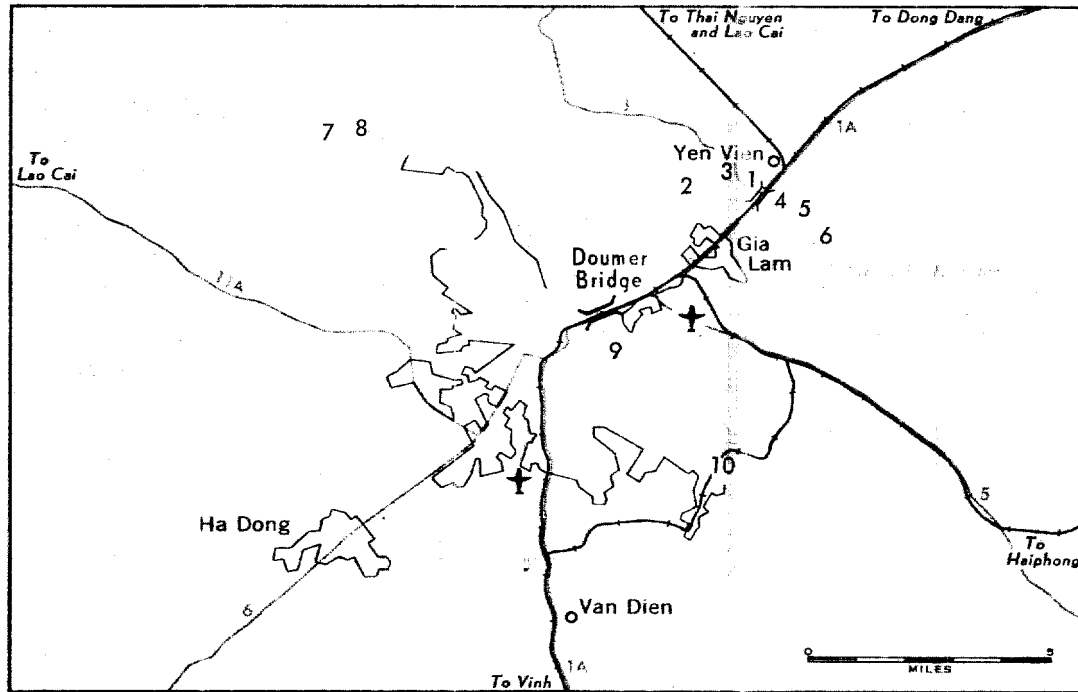
1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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Hanoi Area By-pass System



- 1 Original Canal des Rapides Bridge
- 2 Highway ferry and pontoon bridge
- 3 Highway cable bridge
- 4 Alternate rail/highway bridge
- 5 Probable rail/highway bridge (u/c)
- 6 Rail ferry
- 7 Highway ferry
- 8 Highway ferry
- 9 Highway ferry
- 10 Rail ferry

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] two US newspapermen traveling in eastern Cambodia near the South Vietnamese border discovered what they believed to be a recently occupied Viet Cong base camp. The journalists said the site was big enough for a battalion and included a mess hall, infirmary, and headquarters units, and a vehicle parking area. A Cambodian military officer who was with the newsmen was described as being quite surprised, and apparently refused to take the journalists into the camp without "protective troops." [REDACTED]

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2. The site in question, opposite South Vietnam's Tay Ninh Province, could well be a Viet Cong facility. It is an area of extensive Communist supply and medical activity.

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3. Although Western newspapermen have made numerous trips to border areas in search of Communist activity in the past, this is the first time that any suspicious activity has been identified. Since the US reporters were making the border inspection at Sihanouk's invitation, it will be more difficult for Phnom Penh to issue a flat denial.

Bridge Repair

4. The North Vietnamese now have or are working on seven different facilities for crossing the Canal des Rapides on the main rail and road routes from China to Hanoi.

[REDACTED]
the original bridge across the canal was serviceable again. It was damaged on 26 October. A railroad ferry, a highway ferry, and one cable and one pontoon bridge are available as alternates to the main bridge. One alternate to the main bridge was unserviceable as of 5 November. In addition, construction is under way on what appears to be a new railroad-highway bridge.

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6. With the main bridge and backups available for crossing the Canal des Rapides, the main obstruction to through traffic from China to Hanoi is now the Doumer Bridge at the Red River. Repairs on the two spans knocked out by bombings on 24 October are under way, [REDACTED]

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